

affirmed by so many wyse. Secoundly, I seye that alle wommen been wikke, & noon good of hem alle; for Of a thousand men, seith Salomon, I foond o good man, but certes, of alle wommen, good woman foond I nevere. And also, certes, if I governed me by thy conseil, it sholde seme that I hadde yve to thee over me the maistrie; and God forbode that it so were! for Ihesus Syrak seith, That if the wyf have maistrie, she is contrarious to hir housbonde; and Salomon seith, Nevere in thy lyf, to thy wyf, ne to thy child, ne to thy freend, ne yve no power over thyself; for better it were that thy children aske of thy persone thynges that hem nedeth, than thou be thyself in the handes of thy children. And also, if I wolde werke by thy conseil, certes, my conseil, myghe moste somtyme be secree, til it were tyme that it moste be knowe, and this ne may noght be; for it is written. The janglerye of wommen can hiden thynges that they witen noght. Furthermore, the philosophe saith. In wikked conseil wommen venquysse men. And for this resoun I ne ow nat usen thy conseil.

HANNE dame Prudence, ful debonairly & with greet patience, hadde herd al that hir housbonde liked for to seye, thanne axed she of hym licence for to speke, and seyde in this wise. My lord, quod she, as to youre firste resoun, certes it may lightly been answered; for I seye that it is no folie to chaunge conseil whan the thyng is chaunged; or elles whan the thyng semeth ootherweyes than it was bifore. And moore over I seye, that though ye han sworn and bihight to perfourme youre emprise, and natheles ye weyve to perfourme thilke same emprise by juste cause, men sholde nat seyn therfore that ye were a lier ne forsworn. For the book seith that. The wise man maketh no lesyng whan he turneth his corage to the better. And albeit so that youre emprise be establissed & ordeyned by greet multitude of folk, yet that ye nat accomplice thilke same ordinaunce but yow like; for the trouthe of thynges & the profit been rather founden in fewe folk that been wise and ful of resoun, than by greet multitude of folk, ther every man crieth and clatereth what that hym liketh; soothly, swich multitude is nat honeste.

AS to the seconde resoun, whereas ye seyn that Alle wommen been wikke; save youre grace, certes ye despisen alle wommen in this wyse; & he that alle despiseth alle displeseth, as seith the book; and Senec seith, that whoso wole have sapience, shal no man desprise; but he shal

gladly techen the science that he kan, withouten presumpcioun or pride; and swiche thynges as he nought ne kan, he shal nat been ashamed to lerne hem and enquire of lasse folk than hymself. And sire, that ther hath been many a good womman that lightly be preved; for certes, sire, our Lord Ihesu Crist wolde nevere have descended to be born of a womman, if alle wommen hadden ben wikke. And after that, for the grete bountee that is in wommen, our Lord Ihesu Crist, whan he was risen fro deeth to lyve, appeered rather to a womman than to his Apostles; & though that Salomon seith that he ne foond nevere womman good, it folweth nat therfore that alle wommen been wikke. For though that he ne foond no good womman, certes, ful many another man hath founden many a womman ful good and trewe. Or elles, peradventure, the entente of Salomon was this; that, as in sovereyn bountee, he foond no womman; this is to seyn, that ther is no wight that hath sovereyn bountee, save God allone; as he hymself recordeth in hys evaungelie. For ther nys no creature so good that hym ne wanteth somwhat of the perfeccioun of God, that is his maker.

YOURE thridde resoun is this; ye seyn, If ye governe yow by my conseil, it sholde seme that ye hadde yve me the maistrie & the lordshipe over youre persone. Sire, save youre grace, it is nat so. For if it were so, that no man sholde be conseilled but oonly of hem that hadden lordshipe & maistrie of his persone, men wolden nat be conseilled so ofte; for soothly, thilke man that asketh conseil of a purpos, yet hath he free choys, whether he wole werke by that conseil or noon.

AND as to youre fourthe resoun; ther ye seyn that The janglerie of wommen hath hyd thynges that they wiste noght, as who seith, that A womman kan nat hyde that she woot. Sire, these wordes been understonde of wommen that been jangleresses and wikked; of whiche wommen, men seyn that Thre thynges dryven a man out of his hous; that is to seyn, smoke, droppynge of reyn, and wikked wyves; & of swiche wommen seith Salomon, that It were better dwelle in desert, than with a womman that is riotous; and sire, by youre leve, that am nat I; for ye han ful ofte assayed my grette silence and my grette patience; and eek how wel that I kan hyde and hele thynges that men oghte secretly to hyde.

AND soothly, as to youre fifthe resoun, whereas ye seyn that In wikked conseil wommen venquysse men; God woot, thilke resoun stant heere

in no stede. For, understood now, ye asken conseil to do wikkednesse; and if ye wole werken wikkednesse, and youre wif restreyneth thilke wikked purpos and overcometh yow by resoun and by good conseil; certes youre wyf oghte rather to be preised than yblamed. Thus sholde ye understonde the philosophe that seith. In wikked conseil wommen venquysse hir housbondes.

AND theras ye blamen alle wommen and hir resouns, I shal shewe yow by many ensamples, that many a womman hath ben ful good, and yet been; and hir conseil ful hoolsome and profitable. Eek som men han seyde that The conseil, seillynge of wommen is outhere to deere, or elles to litel of pris. But, albeit so that ful many a womman is badde, and hir conseil vile & noght worth, yet han men founde ful many a good womman, and ful discrete and wise in conseil, lyng.

WOO, Jacob, by good conseil of his mooder Rebekka, wan the benyoun of Ysaak his fader, and the lordshipe over alle his bretheren. Judith, by hire good conseil, delivered the citee of Bethulie, in which she dwelled, out of the handes of Oloferus, that hadde it bisegged and wolde have al destroyed it. Abygail delivered Nabal hir housbonde fro David the kyng, that wolde have slayn hym, and apayssed the ire of the kyng by hir wit and by hir good conseil. Hester enhaunced greetly by hir good conseil the peple of God in the regne of Assuerus the kyng; and the same bountee in good conseil, lyng of many a good womman may men telle. And moore over, whan our Lord hadde creat Adam our forme fader, he seyde in this wise: It is nat good to been a man allone; make we to hym an helpe semblable to hymself.

THERE may ye see, that if that wommen were nat goode, and hir conseil goode & profitable, our Lord God of hevne wolde nevere han wrought hem, ne called hem help of man, but rather confusioun of man. And ther seyde oones a clerk in two vers. What is better than gold? Jaspre. What is better than jaspre? Wisedoom. And what is better than wisedoom? Womman. And what is better than a good womman? Nothyng. And sire, by manye of othere resouns may ye seen, that manye wommen been goode, & hir conseil goode & profitable. And therfore, sire, if ye wol triste to my conseil, I shal restore yow youre doghter hool and sound. And eek I wol do to yow so muche, that ye shul have honour in this cause.

HAN Melibee hadde herd the wordes of his wyf Prudence, he seyde thus: I see wel that the word of Salomon is sooth. He seith that Wordes that been spoken discretely, by ordinaunce, been honycombes; for they yeven swetnesse to the soule, and hool-somnesse to the body; and, wyf, bycause of thy sweete wordes, and eek for I have assayed & preved thy grete sapience and thy grete trouthe, I wol governe me by thy conseil in alle thyng.

WOO sire, quod dame Prudence, and syn ye vouchesauf to been governed by my conseil, I wol enforme yow how ye shul governe youreself in chesynge of youre conseilours. Yesul first, in alle youre werkes mekely biseken to the heighe God that he wol be youre conseilour; & shapeth yow to swich entente, that he yve yow conseil & confort, as taughte Thobie his sone. At alle tymes thou shalt blesse God, and praye hym to dresse thy weyes; and looke that alle thy conseil be in hym for evermoore. Seint Jame eek seith. If any of yow have nede of sapience, axe it of God. And afterward, thanne shul ye taken conseil of youreself and examyne wel youre thoghtes of swich thyng as yow thynketh that is best for youre profit; and thanne shul ye dryve fro youre herte thre thynges that been contrarious to good conseil, that is to seyn, ire, covetise, and hastifnesse.

FIRST, he that axeth conseil of hymself, certes he moste been withouten ire, for manye causes. The firste is this; he that hath greet ire and wrathe in hymself, he weneth alwey that he may do thyng that he may nat do. And secoundly, he that is irous and wrooth, he ne may nat wel deme; & he that may nat wel deme, may nat wel conseil. The thridde is this; that he that is irous & wrooth, as seith Senec, ne may nat speke but he blame thynges; & with his vicious wordes he stireth oother folk to angre and to ire. And eek sire, ye moste dryve covetise out of youre herte; for the apostle seith that Covetise is roote of alle harmes; and trust wel that a covetous man ne kan noght deme ne thynke, but oonly to fulfille the ende of his covetise; and certes, that ne may nevere been accomplished; for evere the moore habundance that he hath of riches, the moore he desireth. And sire, ye moste also dryve out of youre herte hastifnesse; for certes, ye ne may nat deme for the beste a sodeyn thought that falleth in youre herte, but ye moste avyse yow on it ful ofte, for as ye herde bifore, the commune proverbe is this, that he that soone deemeth, soone repent